

After my Christian conversion while in college, I was taught repeatedly that it was inappropriate and wrong for women to assume formal or highly visible leadership roles within the Christian community. The Bible forbade it and male leaders reinforced this with support from the women around them. Women should labor quietly and almost invisibly "behind the scenes," with a submissive spirit under male leadership. I even co-authored a discussion Bible study guide that asserted that public speaking and teaching gifts were restricted to men while women had other gifts such as the gift of "service" and "helps."

Over a 50 year journey of Christian discipleship, I have had to work through, at theoretical, personal and practical levels, the issues related to women in leadership. I have sought biblical and theological perspective and practical insight to face the challenges of congregational leadership, educational leadership and leadership in the world's largest Christian relief and development agency.

It has been a fascinating and wonderful set of experiences with many obstacles, difficulties, and much encouragement along the way. Over the years I became the first tenured faculty member in Fuller Seminary's School of Theology, the first woman president of a Christian college in the Coalition of Christian Colleges and Universities, the first woman chairing the International Board of World Vision and the first Presbyterian woman senior pastor in a church of more than 2000 members. None of this was easy or

accomplished without stumbling, failures and weakness. Yet through it all, I have become and remain passionate about God's call for women to serve in all arenas of life with confidence, courage, hope and the full support of the people of God. In this lecture series, I plan to address a few of the major topics dealing with the realities and possibilities for Christian women and men in leadership within the Church and beyond in the 21st century.